

Statement of Rep. Henry A. Waxman
American Hospital Association
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Thank you for your warm welcome. It is a pleasure to be here with a group that I know shares my commitment to health and wellbeing and recognizes the importance of improving health for all Americans. I am honored to receive this award today.

First, I want to take a moment to congratulate Tom Priselac, President and CEO of Cedars Sinai Hospital located right in Los Angeles. I have known Tom for many years, and I can attest to his many years of distinguished service. Cedars Sinai has a fantastic reputation in California and Tom is a large part of that. Congratulations, Tom, on your award today.

As many of you know, after 40 years, I am retiring from Congress at the end of the year. I have been honored to serve in this institution for such a long time and to have worked on some of the most important issues of our day.

Legislating has never been easy. Our system of checks and balances makes it simpler to stop bills than to enact them. Perseverance is what gets laws made.

We have made great progress in the battle against tobacco since the first Surgeon General's report on smoking was released 50 years ago. Think for a minute back to the days in the 1970's and 80's where smoking on an airplane was common, where any restaurant in town was filled with smoke as you dined. People even smoked in hospitals.

And now, the air we breathe is cleaner and tobacco smoke in public spaces is a thing of the past. That fight, that public awareness campaign, that effort, took many years.

It was 15 years from the day the tobacco chief executives denied to my subcommittee that nicotine was addictive to the day President Obama signed a law

giving the Food and Drug Administration jurisdiction over cigarettes and other tobacco products. Among other provisions, the law called for immediate restrictions on the sale and distribution of cigarettes and smokeless tobacco to kids. Fifteen years is a long time. But time well worth the effort.

Remember when HIV-AIDS was considered only a gay men's disease? Remember the days where no one would discuss the epidemic that was slowly killing people? I had to hold 30 hearings from 1982 to 1990 to draw enough public attention to HIV-AIDS to enact the law that finally recognized that the disease existed and provided care to those afflicted. We drew attention to the problem, pushed for breakthroughs to improve outcomes for patients, prevented countless deaths, and educated the public – bringing us from a very dark age to where we are now.

People now take generic drugs and nutrition labels on foods for granted, but the laws creating them were not easy fights, either. Is there more work to do here? Certainly. And I am hopeful that my colleagues will take up the mantle and push forward.

In the 1980s and early 1990s, I wrote 24 laws that expanded Medicaid coverage one small step at a time: to children of the working poor, to low-income women experiencing their first pregnancies, to parents transitioning to work.

I worked with Sen. Edward M. Kennedy and Rep. John D. Dingell to enact the Children's Health Insurance Program in 1997, another major step forward. But it was not until 2010 — my 36th year in Congress — that my dream of affordable health insurance coverage for all was finally enacted into law.

Have there been bumps and hiccups along the way implementing the law? Yes, that is to be expected with any new program. But, we are already seeing the positive effects of the law.

A little over a month ago was the first enrollment deadline for the Affordable Care Act – and enrollment surpassed expectations. More than 8 million Americans enrolled in private coverage through the marketplaces. ACA

enrollment significantly exceeded CBO's estimated enrollment, proving every pundit and doubter in this country wrong. In contrast, Medicare Part D enrollment, which Republicans hailed as an unqualified success, only reached 70% of its CBO estimated enrollment.

The surge in enrollment we saw during the first open enrollment period and particularly the final days of open enrollment was remarkable. In the waning hours of enrollment, there were 4.8 million visits to HealthCare.gov and about 2 million calls to CMS call centers.

In addition to this most recent success, preliminary data indicates that at least 3 million people are newly enrolled through the Medicaid expansion; discrimination based on pre-existing conditions is a thing of the past; the self-employed and entrepreneurs finally have access to good, affordable coverage; and this comes on top of millions more young Americans getting covered under their parents' plans, the full Patients' Bill of Rights, huge savings for seniors on prescription drugs, and encouraging trends in controlling health care costs.

We have a lot to be proud of, and I want to thank you all for your support of the ACA and your support as we have moved forward to change our nation for the better.

While there are still a number of states that have not taken up the Medicaid expansion, I firmly believe time will change minds. Providers like you all, the hospitals who bear the brunt of the uninsured crisis, and consumer advocates and patients will ultimately win out. I believe we will see more and more states take the morally and fiscally sound path to expand Medicaid coverage. And I know you will continue to push for progress in the states that have yet to move forward.

In addition to the important coverage expansions under the Affordable Care Act, the law deserves much credit for its delivery system reform efforts as well. I know that you all are center stage for many of these efforts, such as reducing readmissions and better coordinating care through Accountable Care Organizations and the Medicare Shared Savings Program. The law also set in motion innovations testing bundled payments and other new care models through the Centers for

Medicare and Medicaid Innovation. This new focus on improving patient experience of care, improving the health of populations, and reducing costs is going to drive our health system forward for years to come.

While most Republicans still have not embraced the Affordable Care Act, in spite of the fact their constituents, hospitals, businesses, and communities are benefitting from the law, we have been able to push ahead bipartisan legislation on the public health front.

This year we have advanced several bipartisan public health bills through the House, some of which have already been signed into law. Recent accomplishments include legislation that reauthorizes graduate medical education training for pediatricians and pediatric subspecialists at freestanding children's hospitals and a bill that reauthorizes the poison control center program. There are also a number of additional measures of interest to Democratic and Republican members alike.

I also want to note that there has been a great deal of attention on the issue of mental health and how we can improve the nation's mental health system. The increased coverage provided by the ACA and the mental health benefits it requires will make a substantial improvement in the lives of millions of Americans who need these services. The expansion of Medicaid in many states has also made a huge difference for mental health, though regrettably some states still refuse to extend their programs. But still, more needs to be done.

In closing, Congress has a busy year ahead. Over the course of my 40 years in office, I have had the great honor to work on the most important health care issues that have shaped our health care infrastructure, improving lives and finding cures. I will apply myself with as much energy and effort this year as I have before, and I hope that there will be more legislation to come before this year comes to a close.